

# SOME INDIAN BIRDS











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## The Crow

The Crow is the most common of all birds. He is found in almost all parts of the world. He likes to be near people wherever they live.

There are two kinds of Crows. One is the Common House Crow, which is black in colour with a grey neck. The other is the Jungle Crow. This is bigger than the House Crow and is black all over.

The House Crow eats almost anything, but has a special liking for the food man eats, and that is why these Crows spend most of the day around houses and other dwellings.

The House Crow spends the night in the company of other crows in some trees far away, but at daybreak he comes back, cawing loudly, to the same place where he was the previous day.

The Crow is intelligent, clever, and cunning. He is also a pest and a thief. He steals any kind of food, and often takes away bright-looking articles like ornaments, or small things like cakes of soap. He soon drops them, however, when he finds they are not good to eat!

The Crow has a great sense of danger and warns other Crows if anything arouses his suspicion.

The Crow builds his nest in the fork of the branches of tall trees, using twigs, feathers, fibres, and, sometimes, even small pieces of wire. The nest looks ugly from outside, but inside it is tidy and cosy.

The mother Crow lays four or five eggs at a time. The eggs are pale bluish-green and have brown markings. Both parents together hatch the eggs and look after the young ones.



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# The House Sparrow

The House Sparrow is another very common bird. Sparrows like to live with people. They make themselves quite at home in houses, and more often than not they are a nuisance.

Sparrows are always found in pairs, and several pairs can be seen at a time. They are brown in colour, with white and black mingled together on the back and sides, and with a whitish front. The male sparrow has a black patch on his throat.

Sparrows eat grain, insects, and the tender shoots of plants. They are also fond of cooked food.

Sparrows build their nests wherever they can—on window-sills, the tops of doors and almirahs, and in nooks and corners. Their nests can be found in holes and niches in walls and on roofs and in the most unlikely places, even inside the folds of hanging curtains!

The mother bird lays three or four eggs which are a pale greenish-white. Sparrows are known to raise several families in a year.

Sparrows are friendly little birds, and with a little patience they can be tamed.







# The Common Myna

Another Indian bird which loves to live near people is the Common Myna. The Myna is a dark-brown bird with a white patch on the wings, a bright yellow bill, and a yellow patch round the eyes.

Mynas eat fruits, grain, insects, and kitchen refuse. Sometimes they feed on the ticks found on cattle, or follow the plough, eating the insects they find as the earth is turned up.

Mynas build nests in the holes and hollows of tree trunks or the walls of old buildings. The nests are made of twigs, roots, paper, fibre, and cotton.

The mother bird lays four or five shiny blue eggs. Both parents hatch the eggs and look after the young ones.

Mynas are sometimes caught when they are young and kept as pets. They can make sounds which appear as if they are repeating the words they hear often.







## The Hill Myna

The Hill Myna is very similar to the Common Myna, but he is bigger in size and darker in colour—almost black—except for two bright yellow patches of bare skin on either side of the head.

Hill Mynas, as their name shows, are generally found in the hills. They build their nests in the hollows of trees. They live on insects and fruits, and drink the nectar found in flowers.

Hill Mynas make better pets than Common Mynas and they can imitate human voices better.



# The Blue Rock Pigeon

The common Pigeon seen flying about in ancient buildings, such as fortresses, is the Blue Rock Pigeon.

These are wild Pigeons and are found all over India. They are greyish-blue in colour, with purple and green markings around the neck. There are two dark bars on the wings and a dark band across the tail.

Pigeons eat mostly grain and nuts, and are usually found where these are easily available or stored.

Blue Rock Pigeons build their nests with twigs and fibres in convenient hollows and cavities on top of old buildings, houses, or even rocks.

The mother bird lays two white eggs. Both parents share the task of hatching the eggs and looking after the young ones. Unlike most birds, the mother Pigeon feeds her babies with a kind of milk found in a sac in her neck.







## The Dove

Doves look like Pigeons, but they are smaller and of a different colour.

There are three kinds of Doves. The Ring Dove is so called as he has a black ring round the back of his neck.

The Spotted Dove is white-spotted, pinkish-brown, and grey. He has black and white markings—like those on a chessboard—on the back of his neck.

The Brown Dove is smaller and shy, with a brownish-grey back and pinkish-brown underparts. He has brown and black checks on either side of the neck.

All Doves build nests and lay eggs similar to those of wild Pigeons.

Doves are so gentle that people consider them a symbol of peace.



# The Common Babbler

Common Babblers always form groups of six or seven. This is why they are often called the 'Seven Sisters'. They can be seen around houses, hopping about on the ground and among the plants and bushes.

They spend most of their time on the ground looking for insects and grubs. They also eat grain and berries and drink the nectar found in flowers.

These birds are a dull brown with darker patches on the back. Their tails are fairly long and look untidy.

Babblers' nests are made of grass and roots. They look like cups tucked away at the bottom of thorny bushes, and are seldom situated more than five feet above the ground.

The mother bird lays three or four glossy turquoise-coloured eggs, usually between March and July.

Babblers are the noisiest of all birds, continually calling and babbling to each other and fluttering about on the ground.

They keep together all the time, protecting each other from danger. They do all their chores jointly. They even hatch the eggs and bring up the young ones in groups.







# The Domestic Fowl

Man has domesticated the Jungle Fowl from time immemorial, and the Domestic Fowl has become one of the most valued sources of man's food.

We all know the beautiful Cock. He has a red comb and a long, curved, multi-coloured tail, and two red wattles or pieces of skin hanging from his chin. He crows loudly every morning at daybreak.

Compared to the Cock, the Hen is not so beautifully marked. She has a smaller comb and wattles, and a much shorter tail. Sometimes these birds are all-white or all-black, with red combs and wattles. But the Cock is always the more magnificent of the two.

The Hen makes a nest in soft grass or hay and lays one egg a day for six or seven days together. After a break of one or two days, she begins to lay again. The eggs may be either plain white, brown, or speckled. If the eggs are not taken away, the Hen will continue to lay until there are about ten or twelve eggs in the nest. She will then sit on them until a brood of chicks is hatched.

The Hen and Cock feed on grain, seeds, and insects. With the help of their sharp claws, they scratch up the earth to feed themselves and their young ones.

Delicious food can be prepared from the eggs and from the birds themselves.







## The Domestic Duck

Another bird familiar to us, like the Hen and the Cock, is the Duck. It is a common sight to see Domestic Ducks swimming about in small ponds in or near villages.

Like the Cock, the male Duck or drake is more beautiful than the female. There are many kinds of Duck, all different in colour. The Domestic Ducks are usually white or brown in colour. Among them, the drakes look more colourful with their blue and green markings.

All Ducks have flat bills with which they pick up insects, small water plants, and fish from the water. Their feet have toes which are joined together by a web of thin skin. This helps them to swim.

The mother Duck lays her eggs in a shallow nest built among the grasses near the edges of a pond. The eggs are pale blue. The birds and the eggs are both very good to eat.







## The Rose-Ringed Parakeet

One of the most beautiful birds is the Rose-ringed Parakeet. Parakeets are a brilliant green. When perched on a tree they are hardly visible as their colour mingles with the green of the leaves.

The male bird has a rose-pink and black collar round his neck. Both the male and female birds have large brilliant-red bills.

These birds eat fruit and grain, and they cause much destruction. A large part of the fruit goes waste as the birds leave it half-eaten.

The mother bird lays four to six almost white round eggs, usually between February and April. She places them in a hole in a tree or wall. Both parents look after the eggs.







# The Peacock

The most proud-looking among birds is the Peacock, the national bird of India.

The Peacock has a long and very colourful tail. He looks majestic when he spreads out his tail like a huge fan and raises it up behind his head. The tail, which is almost four feet long, has green feathers which have beautiful blue 'eyes' with a copper brown border round them. The Peacock has a greenish-blue body. There is a large crest on his head.

Unlike the gorgeous male, the female bird, or Peahen, has no long tail. She is a mottled brown, with blue and green on her breast. She too has a crest.

The Peahen scrapes a shallow nest in the ground under a bush and lines it with sticks. In this she lays three to five glossy cream-coloured eggs, usually between January and October.

These birds eat grain, the tender shoots of plants, insects, lizards, and snakes. They live close to villages where the villagers look after them. They can be easily tamed.







# The Hoopoe

The Hoopoe is pale brown with black and white stripes on his back, wings, and tail. He has a large crest on his head, which opens and shuts like a fan.

The Hoopoe has a long curved bill which he digs into the ground to find insects and grubs which are his food.

The mother bird lays five or six eggs in a hole in a tree or wall. The hole is given a rough lining of twigs and rubbish and gives out a very bad smell. The mother never leaves her nest while the eggs are being hatched. She is herself fed by the male bird.







## The Great Horned Owl

The Great Horned Owl remains all day long under a bush in thick woods and comes out only at night.

These Owls are speckled brown with a lighter shade under the breast. They have large tufts of hair standing up like ears or horns. It is from these that the Horned Owl gets his name. He has large round eyes, and these enable him to see at night.

The Horned Owl feeds on mice, rats, small animals, fish, and crabs.

The Horned Owl's nest is the natural hollow or cleft in a tree or rock. It is often found near villages. The mother bird lays three or four creamy, oval-shaped eggs, between November and March.



# The Koel

The Koel is generally considered the most musical among Indian birds. Many an Indian poet has sung his praises. In the spring, all through the day and night, one can hear the Koel singing. At the approach of winter, the bird becomes silent, and in winter he migrates to warmer parts.

The Koel is a very strange bird, as he never builds his own nest. Between April and August the mother bird goes in search of a Crow's nest and there she lays her eggs. She leaves them there for the Crow to hatch. Once as many as thirteen Koel's eggs were found in a Crow's nest !

The eggs are pale grey with brown speckles and look very much like a Crow's eggs. The unsuspecting Crow hatches the Koel's eggs and feeds the baby Koels along with her own young ones !

The male Koel is shiny black with yellowish-green and crimson round the eyes. The female is quite different in colour, and is a dull brown with white spots and lines.

Koels like to live in large leafy trees, and they can be seen in groves of trees in many parts of India.

These birds eat fruits and caterpillars and other insects.







## The Weaver-Bird

The most unusual thing about the Weaver-bird is his long bottle-shaped nest, seen hanging in groups from the branches of trees.

It is the male bird who builds the nest, using strips of grass and paddy-leaf woven together. The nest has a long narrow passage, with a hollow at one end for the eggs. It is suspended from the end of a branch or a cluster of twigs, usually over water.

The male has several 'wives' and builds a cluster of nests together. As soon as one nest is completed, the mother bird goes into it and lays two to four pure white eggs, generally between May and September.

Weaver-birds look rather like Sparrows, except during the mating season. Then the male bird has a yellow breast, with blackish-brown marks on the side of his head and chin.

Weaver-birds live on grain and seeds. They build their nests near paddy fields, so that they can feed on the rice grain. They often cause great damage to the crops.









## The Golden-Backed Woodpecker

The Golden-backed Woodpecker is a very pretty bird. He is pale yellow and black in front ; his sides are spotted black and white, and his back is a lovely golden yellow with black markings. Both the male and female birds have black tails, but the male has a red patch on his head and also a red crest, while the female has only the red crest.

The Woodpecker has a long, strong, pointed bill which he uses to peck holes in the bark of trees. When a hole has been made, the Woodpecker puts in his long sticky tongue to get at the grubs and insects inside. He particularly likes the large black ants found on the trees and on the ground. Woodpeckers also eat fruits.

The mother bird lays three white glossy eggs in the unlined hollow of a tree, between March and August.



# The Golden Oriole

The Golden Oriole is a lovely bird and can be seen singly or in pairs among the trees in thick woods.

The male bird is a beautiful golden yellow with a few black feathers on his wings and tail. The female is more greenish in colour. One variety has a black head, neck, and breast.

The Golden Oriole's nest is a lovely cup-shaped hollow made of grass and bound together with cobwebs. The nest is suspended high up between the branches of a tree.

The mother bird lays two or three eggs between April and July. The eggs are white, with black or brown spots. Golden Orioles feed on insects and fruits.





## The Crow Pheasant

The Crow Pheasant is a large bird, black with chestnut-coloured wings.

He hardly ever flies up into trees, but hops along the ground picking up large insects from under bushes. He also eats lizards and mice, and even steals small birds and eggs from the nests of other birds.

Crow Pheasants make large, untidy, round nests out of twigs and leaves. The nest is built in the centre of a thorn bush or a low tree.

The female bird usually lays three or four eggs between February and September. The eggs are a dull chalky white. Both parents look after the eggs.







# The Black Partridge

The Black Partridge is a small plump bird with hardly any tail. He is mostly black, with spots and bars of white. The male bird has a chestnut collar and white patches on his cheeks, but the female has just a patch of chestnut on her back.

Partridges do not fly high above the ground. They can be seen running along between low bushes or among the crops in the fields. They feed on white ants, grain, and the tender shoots of plants. (Farmers do not like them because they often damage the crops in the fields.)

The Partridge's nest is simply a shallow place on the ground, lined with grass. It can be found among cane fields or in low scrub. The mother bird lays six to eight olive-brown eggs between April and July.

There are other kinds of Partridges as well. The Grey Partridge has habits similar to those of the Black Partridge, but is a grey-brown with chestnut blotches on the back, and wavy brown lines underneath.

The Painted Partridge is brownish black, with many white spots and bars. The head and wings are reddish. The female has a white neck. Unlike Black Partridges, Painted Partridges are sometimes found in trees.

Like cock-fights, partridge-fights are a common village sport in certain parts of India. Only Grey Partridges are used for these fights. The owners of the birds gather in an open field and place the cages near each other, face to face. When the cages are opened, the birds come out and begin to fight.







## The Racket-Tailed Drongo

Birds which are completely black are rare. The Racket-tailed Drongo is one of them. He is a deep glossy black with a black tuft on the forehead. He has a very long forked tail. The tail is longer than the bird itself, and consists of two long, thin feathers, like wires, which widen out at the ends.

Racket-tailed Drongos live in forests at the foot of mountains and seldom go near villages. They live in large flocks and make a great deal of noise. The Drongo can often be heard imitating other birds.

Drongos feed on moths and large insects, and drink the nectar from flowers.

The mother bird lays three or four eggs between March and June. They are creamy white with reddish-brown speckles, and are laid in a deep nest made of fine twigs and rootlets. The nest is fastened to the branch of a tree with cobwebs.

Another kind of Drongo is the Black Drongo or 'King Crow'. This Drongo has a shorter tail, forked at the end.







# The Blue Magpie



The Blue Magpie is a small bird but he has a very long tail. The tail feathers are sometimes as much as fifteen to seventeen inches long. They are blue, tipped with white. The bird has a black head and a few black feathers in his wings. The back is bluish-purple and the underparts are greyish-white. Some Magpies have yellow bills, and others have red ones.

These birds eat fruits and insects, and have also been seen stealing eggs and the young ones of other birds from their nests.

The Magpie's nest is like a small shallow cup and is made of twigs and leaves. The mother bird lays five or six stone-coloured eggs. The nesting season is from April to June.



# The Tree Pie

The Tree Pie has a tail that is as long as the Blue Magpie's, but the two birds differ in colour. Tree Pies are greyish-brown with a black head and brown neck. Most of the underparts are reddish-brown. The tail is greyish-white, but is edged with black and has a black tip.

The Tree Pie's habits are similar to those of the Blue Magpie; but the Tree Pie's nest is different in that it is rather like a platform.

The Tree Pie's eggs vary in colour from bluish-stone to deep cream, and have reddish-brown blotches.





# The Great Pied Hornbill

Very spectacular in appearance, the Great Pied Hornbill can never be mistaken. It is a large bird with a huge, yellow, curved bill. The bill is surmounted by a shield-like growth which is also yellow. The bird is rather heavily built, with a black back and a white neck. The wings are black except for the outer feathers which are white, tipped with black.

The female bird has a most unusual way of making her nest. She chooses a hollow in a tree and goes into it. Then she builds a wall round herself using her own droppings and also some mud brought to her by the male. She completely encases herself, except for one small hole through which the male bird feeds her. She then lays two to four white eggs in this 'mud-house' and stays there until the baby birds are about two weeks old. She then breaks open the wall and comes out. The nesting season is between March and June.

Hornbills feed on fruits, mice, lizards, and sometimes tiny birds.

The Hornbill's feathers are very beautiful. Some Indian tribesmen decorate themselves with these feathers.







# The Grey Heron

The Grey Heron is essentially a water bird. Herons cannot swim, however, because their legs are too long. They can be seen standing almost motionless at the edge of ponds or in shallow water. There they wait patiently, with necks craned and bills poised, ready to catch any unwary fish or frog. Sometimes they just stand with hunched shoulders, usually alone.

The Grey Heron is about the size of a Vulture, and has thin long legs. Herons have ash-grey wings and back, with a white head and a long white neck which bends into an 's'.

There is a long black dotted line down the front of the neck, and two long black feathers on the head. The feathers on the neck are rather shaggy and there are occasional black ones.

For a nest the Grey Heron builds a platform of sticks leaving a shallow depression in the middle. Although in the water they prefer to be alone, Grey Herons build their nests in groups on tree-tops. A group of nests is called a heronry. Other water birds often build nests in the same tree.

The mother Grey Heron lays three to six eggs which are a deep sea-green. The nesting season is between November and March.

When Grey Herons fly, they tuck their heads down between their shoulders by drawing back their long necks. Their long legs trail behind them.







# The Ibis: White and Black

The White Ibis has a naked black head and neck, a white body, and black legs. He has a long bill which curves downwards. White Ibises are often seen at the edge of ponds and in marshy ground where they probe with their bills for frogs.

The Black Ibis has black wings with a white patch on the shoulder. He has red legs and a crown of red warts on his head. These birds prefer higher and drier ground.

Both the White Ibis and the Black Ibis lay two to four eggs. But the eggs of the White Ibis are blue or greenish-white, sometimes with pale yellow spots, while those of the Black Ibis are a bright pale green, sometimes unmarked and sometimes with brown streaks.

Their nests are shallow platforms made of twigs and perched on trees in or near water. The nesting seasons differ. The White Ibis nests between June and August, and the Black Ibis nests between May and October.





# The Night Heron

Night Herons come out only at dusk as they spend the day resting among the leaves in a clump of trees. In the evening they fly off, one by one, to feed in ponds and shallow rivers. They eat fish, crabs, and frogs.

Night Herons are ash-grey above and white underneath, with a black back and head. There is a long, black and white crest on the head.

The nests are built in groups perched high up in trees. The mother bird lays four or five pale sea-green eggs between April and September.





## The White Heron

The White Heron, or large Egret, is a marsh bird, pure white with a black bill. He has long black legs, and black and yellow feet. During the mating season, the male Heron develops a long white drooping crest and fine long feathers on the back and breast.

The Heron's nest is a platform of twigs, lined with straw. It is built in trees among heronries and the nests of other water birds.

The nesting season is from July to August in northern India and from November to February in the south.

The Heron's food is mainly insects, frogs, and small reptiles which he catches in his long bill.

The mother bird lays four pale bluish-green eggs.







# The Adjutant Stork



This bird is the largest of the stork family found in India. He stands about four feet high. The bird is unmistakable with his enormous yellow wedge-shaped bill and naked head and neck. He is dirty white, grey, and black, and has a pouch of red skin hanging from his chest.

The Adjutant gets his name from the way he walks up and down. Unlike most storks, he is a scavenger, for he feeds on dead animals and birds. He also eats frogs, fish, and reptiles.

For his nest the Adjutant Stork builds a huge platform of sticks at the top of a tall tree or on a rock. The eggs are white, and three or four eggs are laid at a time.



# The Painted Stork

This is the most beautiful of all storks. The Painted Stork has a white neck and his wings are barred in greenish black. He has a black barred band across the chest. The feathers on the shoulders and wings are pale pink. He has a long yellow bill, slightly curved at the tip, and a yellow featherless face.

Like most storks, he spends his time standing at the edge of ponds and streams, waiting to catch fish and frogs.

The nest, built of twigs and lined with straw and grass, is a platform high up in a tree. Ten to twenty nests can be found together on one tree near water.

The mother bird lays three to five dull-white eggs between August and January.





## ✓The Sarus Crane

The Sarus Crane is a tall, elegant bird, standing about four or five feet high. He is a pale grey. The head and top part of the neck are red and naked. He has long red legs.

Sarus Cranes eat grain, the tender shoots of plants, insects, and reptiles.

They are usually seen in pairs. It is said that they mate for life and are devoted and faithful to each other.

They make a huge nest of paddy straw, reeds, and grasses, usually in the middle of a flooded field. The female bird lays two pale greenish- or pinkish-white eggs, often with brown markings.

The nesting season is from July to December.







# The Flamingo

The Flamingo is a very striking bird to look at. He is about four feet tall with a white body. His neck is like that of the swan. The wings are a beautiful rosy pink edged with black, and the legs are also rosy pink. The bill, which is bright pink at the top and black underneath, is most unusual. It is bent in the middle and is used to collect mud.

The Flamingo stands in shallow salty water and puts his head down between his legs, so that it is upside down under the water. With the top part of his bill he scrapes along the bed of the water and scoops up the mud. He then strains the mud away through his bill and eats the small seeds, insects, and worms that he may find.

The Flamingo's nest is a cone of mud, about six to twelve inches high, with a hollow at the top. Here the mother bird lays one or two eggs. They are white with a faint blue tinge.

Groups of these nests are called Flamingo cities. They are found in large numbers in the Rann of Kutch.

There are two nesting seasons, one from September to October and the other from February to April.









## The Common Kingfisher

The Common Kingfisher is a small, beautifully coloured bird. He is blue-green, with deep rust underparts. His strong, red, pointed bill is used for catching fish, tadpoles, and insects. He dives for them from a branch overhanging the water.

To make a nest the Kingfisher digs a long tunnel into the bank of a stream. The tunnel widens out at the end to form a chamber, and the mother bird goes into this and lays five to seven glossy white eggs. The nesting season is between March and June.

Other kinds of Kingfishers have the same habits, but they differ in colour. The Pied Kingfisher is slightly larger in size and has black and white patches. The White-breasted Kingfisher is similar to the Common Kingfisher, but has a white breast.







## The Brown-Headed Gull

There are many kinds of Gulls, but the most common, found near the Indian sea coast, is the Brown-headed Gull.

During the summer the head is coffee-brown, but in winter it turns greyish-white. The back is grey and the underparts are white.

The Brown-headed Gull does not nest in India but he usually arrives in September and leaves at the end of April.

Gulls feed on floating garbage and eat almost anything. They pick up food from the water as they glide along, and they rest floating on top of the water.







# The Kite

Kites are birds of prey. They feed on the flesh of dead and living animals.

There are three main kinds of Kites. The Common Pariah Kite is a large brown bird with a forked tail. He lives mainly on offal, garbage, insects, worms, and anything that can be picked up. He can be seen near towns and villages, and will swoop down on anything that is edible.

The nest is an untidy gathering of twigs, rags, rubbish, and wire, and can be seen in trees anywhere in cities and villages. Two to four dirty pinkish-white eggs are laid between September and April.

The Brahmini Kite is a good-looking bird with a rusty-red body, and white head, neck, and breast. This bird inhabits the sea coasts, rivers, and paddy fields, picking up garbage from the sea, and fish, frogs, and small snakes from the wet fields.

The nest is made of twigs and lined with green leaves. Two eggs, greyish-white with reddish-brown speckles, are laid between December and April.

The Black-winged Kite is a much smaller bird, ash grey above and white below. There is a black line above the eyes and black patches on the shoulders. The tail is white.

This bird likes to live among trees, and can be seen towards evening looking for food. He lives on mice, lizards, and crickets which he picks up in his claws to carry away.

The nest, which is very untidy, is built in small trees. There are three or four eggs, yellowish-white with brown blotches. The eggs are laid nearly all the year round.







## The Vulture

The Vulture is often called the 'scavenger of the skies'. He is the ugliest of all birds. A heavy ungainly-looking bird, the Vulture has a naked red neck, head, and legs.

There are several kinds of Vulture. The King Vulture is very common. The back is black, with a white patch on the upper legs and at the bottom of the neck. There is also a white band on the under side of the wings.

Although not so numerous as the White-backed Vulture or the White Scavenger Vulture, the King Vulture can be seen with the others clustered round a carcass or waiting in the trees near some dying animal.

Both the King Vulture and the White-backed Vulture lay only one egg at a time. These eggs are white in colour and laid in a nest which is a platform of twigs high up in a tree.

The White Scavenger Vulture usually lays two eggs varying in colour from white to pale brick-red, with reddish-brown or black blotches. The nest is built in a niche in a rock or in the fork of a tree, between February and April.









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